

Globalization of Culture

Geographers observe that increasingly uniform cultural preferences produce uniform "global" landscapes of material artifacts and of cultural values. Fast-food restaurants, service stations, and retail chains deliberately create a visual appearance that varies among locations as little as possible so that customers know what to expect regardless of where in the world they happen to be. Houses built on the edge of one urban area will look very much like houses built on the edge of urban areas in other regions.

Regardless of local cultural traditions, people around the world aspire to drive an automobile, watch television, and own a house. The survival of a local culture's distinctive beliefs, forms, and traits is threatened by interaction with such social customs as wearing jeans and Nike shoes, consuming Coca-Cola and McDonald's hamburgers, and displaying other preferences in food, clothing, shelter, and leisure activities.

Underlying the uniform cultural landscape is globalization of cultural beliefs and forms, especially religion and language. Africans, in particular, have moved away from traditional religions and have adopted Christianity or Islam, religions shared with hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. Globalization requires a form of common communication, and the English language is increasingly playing that role.

As more people become aware of elements of global culture and aspire to possess them, local cultural beliefs, forms, and traits are threatened with extinction. Yet despite globalization, cultural differences among places not only persist but actually flourish in many places. Global standardization of products does not mean that everyone wants the same cultural products.

The communications revolution that promotes globalization of culture also permits preservation of cultural diversity. Television, for example, is no longer restricted to a handful of channels displaying one set of cultural values. With the distribution of programming through cable and satellite systems, people may choose from hundreds of programs rather than a handful. The proliferation in programming means that people in English-speaking countries now have the opportunity to watch programs in other languages, such as Spanish in the United States, Welsh in the United Kingdom, or Gaelic in Ireland.

With the globalization of communications, people in two distant places can watch the same television program. At the same time, with the fragmentation of the broadcasting market, two people in the same house can watch different programs. Groups of people on every continent may aspire to wear jeans, but they might live with someone who prefers khakis. In a global culture, companies can target groups of consumers with similar tastes in different parts of the world.

Strong determination on the part of a group to retain its local cultural traditions in the face of globalization of culture can lead to intolerance of people who display other beliefs, social forms, and material traits. Political disputes, unrest, and wars have erupted in places such as Southeast Europe, East Africa, and the Middle East, where different cultural groups have been unable to share the same space peacefully (see Chapter 7).

A much more extreme opposition to globalization led to the attack by al-Qaeda terrorists against the United States on September 11, 2001, with support from the Taliban then in control of Afghanistan (Chapter 8). Al-Qaeda selected

targets—the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—they considered especially visible symbols of U.S. domination of globalization trends in culture, politics, and economy. Afghanistan's Taliban leaders justified such actions as banning television and restricting women's activities as being consistent with local traditions, and such punishments as public floggings and severing of limbs as being a necessary counterbalance to strong forces of globalization.

Culturally, people residing in different places are displaying fewer differences and more similarities in their cultural preferences. But although consumers in different places express increasingly similar cultural preferences, they do not share the same access to them. And the desire of some people to retain their traditional cultural elements, in the face of increased globalization of cultural preferences, has led to political conflict and market fragmentation in some regions.

Globalization has not destroyed the uniqueness of an individual place's culture and economy. Human geographers understand that many contemporary social problems result from a tension between forces promoting global culture and economy on the one hand and preservation of local economic autonomy and cultural traditions on the other hand.

Space: Distribution of Features

Chess and computer games, where pieces are placed on a grid-shaped playing surface, require thinking about space. Pieces are arranged on the game board or screen in order to outmaneuver an opponent or form a geometric pattern. To excel at these games, a player needs spatial skills, the ability to perceive the future arrangement of pieces.

Similarly, spatial thinking is the most fundamental skill that geographers possess to understand the arrangement of objects across surfaces considerably larger than a game board. Geographers think about the arrangement of people and activities found in space and try to understand why those people and activities are distributed across space as they are.

In his framework of all scientific knowledge, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) compared geography's concern for space to history's concern for time. Historians identify the dates of important events and explain why human activities follow one another chronologically. Geographers identify the location of important places and explain why human activities are located beside one another in space. Historians ask when and why. Geographers ask where and why.

Historians organize material chronologically because they understand that an action at one point in time can result from past actions that can in turn affect future ones. Geographers organize material spatially because they understand that an action at one point in space can result from something happening at another point, which can consequently affect conditions elsewhere.

History and geography differ in one especially important manner: A historian cannot enter a time machine to study other eras firsthand; however, a geographer can enter an automobile or airplane to study other spaces. This ability to reach other spaces lends excitement to the discipline of geography—and geographic training raises the understanding of other spaces to a level above that of casual sightseeing.

Distribution

Look around the space you currently occupy—perhaps a classroom, residence hall, or room in a house. Tables, chairs, and other large objects are arranged regularly, such as in a row in a classroom or against a wall at home (though books and papers may be strewn about the space randomly). The room is located in a building that occupies an organized space—along a street, a side of a quadrangle, or next to a park. Similarly, the community containing the campus or house is part of a system of communities arranged across the country and around the world.

Each building and community, as well as every other human or natural object, occupies a unique space on Earth, and geographers explain how these features are arranged across Earth. On Earth as a whole, or within an area of Earth, features may be numerous or scarce, close together or far apart. The arrangement of a feature in space is known as its **distribution**. Geographers identify three main properties of distribution across Earth—density, concentration, and pattern.

DENSITY. The frequency with which something occurs in space is **density**. The feature being measured could be people, houses, trees, volcanoes, or anything. The area could be measured in square kilometers, square miles, hectares, acres, or any other unit of area.

Arithmetic density, which is the total number of objects in an area, is commonly used to compare the distribution of population in different countries. The arithmetic density of Belgium, for example, is 345 persons per square kilometer (900 persons per square mile). This density is the country's total population (10.5 million people) divided by its area (30,278 square kilometers, or 11,690 square miles).

Remember that a large population does not necessarily lead to high density. Arithmetic density involves two measures—the number of people and the land area. The most populous country in the world, China, with approximately 1.3 billion inhabitants, for example, does not have the highest density. The arithmetic density of China—approximately 140 persons per square kilometer (365 persons per square mile)—is less than half that of Belgium. Although China has 125 times more inhabitants than Belgium, it has more than 300 times more land.

High population density is also unrelated to poverty. The Netherlands, one of the world's wealthiest countries, has an arithmetic density of approximately 400 persons per square kilometer (1,040 persons per square mile). One of the poorest countries, Mali, has an arithmetic density of only 11 persons per square kilometer (29 persons per square mile).

Geographers measure density in other ways, depending on the subject being studied. A high **physiological density**—the number of persons per unit of area suitable for agriculture—may mean that a country has difficulty growing enough food to sustain its population. A high **agricultural density**—the number of farmers per unit area of farmland—may mean that a country has inefficient agriculture. A high **housing density**—the number of dwelling units per unit of area—may mean that people live in overcrowded housing.

CONCENTRATION. The extent of a feature's spread over space is its **concentration**. If the objects in an area are close together, they are **clustered**; if relatively far apart, they are **dispersed**. To

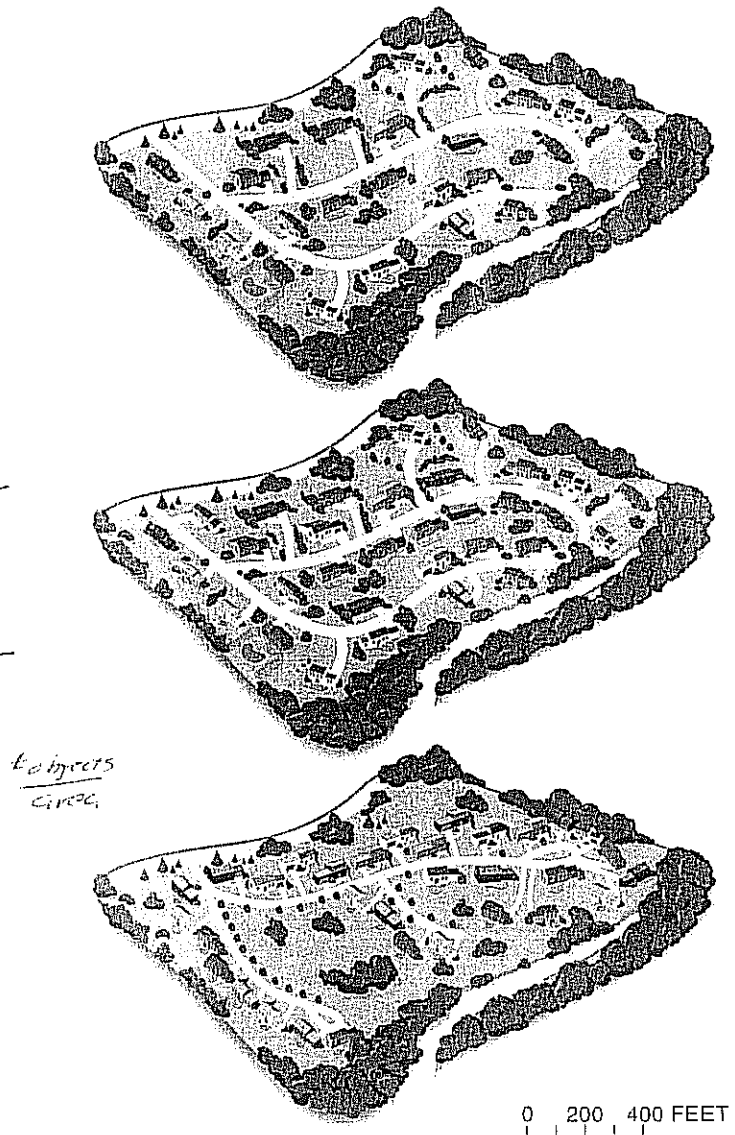


FIGURE 1-18 Distribution. The top plan for a residential area has a lower density than the middle plan (24 houses compared to 32 houses on the same 82-acre piece of land), but both have dispersed concentrations. The middle and lower plans have the same density (32 houses on 82 acres), but the distribution of houses is more clustered in the lower plan. The lower plan has shared open space, whereas the middle plan provides a larger, private yard surrounding each house.

compare the level of concentration most clearly, two areas need to have the same number of objects and the same size area.

Geographers use **concentration** to describe changes in distribution. For example, the distribution of people across the United States is increasingly dispersed. The total number of people living in the United States is growing slowly—less than 1 percent per year—and the land area is essentially unchanged. But the population distribution is changing from relatively clustered in the Northeast to more evenly dispersed across the country.

Concentration is not the same as density. Two neighborhoods could have the same density of housing but different concentrations. In a dispersed neighborhood each house has a large private yard, whereas in a clustered neighborhood the houses are close together and the open space is shared as a community park (Figure 1-18).

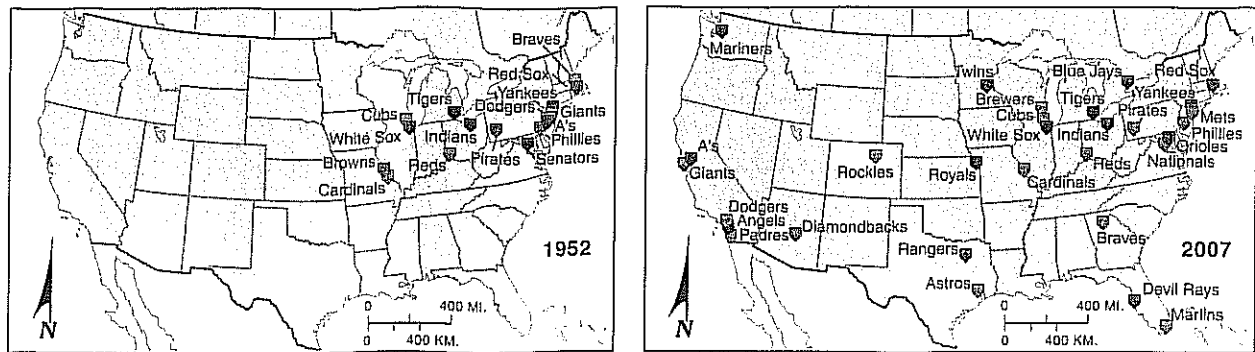


FIGURE 1-19 Density and concentration of baseball teams. The changing distribution of North American baseball teams illustrates the difference between density and concentration.

These six teams moved to other cities during the 1950s and 1960s:

- Braves—Boston to Milwaukee in 1953, then to Atlanta in 1966
- Browns—St. Louis to Baltimore (Orioles) in 1954
- Athletics—Philadelphia to Kansas City in 1955, then to Oakland in 1968
- Dodgers—Brooklyn to Los Angeles in 1958
- Giants—New York to San Francisco in 1958
- Senators—Washington to Minneapolis (Minnesota Twins) in 1961

These 14 teams were added between the 1960s and 1990s:

- Angels—Los Angeles in 1961, then to Anaheim (California) in 1965
- Senators—Washington in 1961, then to Dallas (Texas Rangers) in 1971
- Mets—New York in 1962
- Astros—Houston (originally Colt .45s) in 1962
- Royals—Kansas City in 1969
- Padres—San Diego in 1969
- Expos—Montreal in 1969, then to Washington (Nationals) in 2005
- Pilots—Seattle in 1969, then to Milwaukee (Brewers) in 1970
- Blue Jays—Toronto in 1977
- Mariners—Seattle in 1977
- Marlins—Miami (Florida) in 1993
- Rockies—Denver (Colorado) in 1993
- Devil Rays—Tampa Bay in 1998
- Diamondbacks—Phoenix (Arizona) in 1998

As a result of these relocations and additions, the density of teams increased, and the distribution became more dispersed.

We can illustrate the difference between density and concentration at a far larger scale than a neighborhood. Within North America the distribution of major-league baseball teams changed during the second half of the twentieth century after remaining unchanged during the first half of the twentieth century (Figure 1-19). The major leagues expanded from 16 to 30 teams in North America between 1960 and 1998, thus increasing the density.

At the same time, six of the 16 original teams moved to other locations. In 1952 every team was clustered in the Northeast United States, but the moves dispersed several teams to the West Coast and Southeast. These moves, as well as the spaces occupied by the expansion teams, resulted in a more dispersed distribution.

PATTERN. The third property of distribution is the pattern, which is the geometric arrangement of objects in space. Some features are organized in a geometric pattern, whereas others are distributed irregularly. Geographers observe that many

objects form a linear distribution, such as the arrangement of houses along a street or stations along a subway line.

Objects are frequently arranged in a square or rectangular pattern. Many American cities contain a regular pattern of streets, known as a grid pattern, which intersect at right angles at uniform intervals to form square or rectangular blocks. The system of townships, ranges, and sections established by the Land Ordinance of 1785 is another example of a square or grid pattern. The distribution of baseball teams also follows a regular pattern—the teams are located in North America's largest metropolitan areas (the three largest metropolitan areas have two teams).

A sinister pattern was placed on the American landscape in 2002 by a college student through placement of two dozen pipe bombs. The bomber confessed that he was trying to create a large “smile” pattern across the U.S. interior. He got as far as creating the two “eyes” by placing bombs in two large circles, one in Nebraska and one in eastern Iowa and western Illinois. Before being caught, he also placed bombs in Colorado and Texas to start the “mouth.”

Gender and Ethnic Diversity in Space

Patterns in space vary according to gender and ethnicity. Consider first the daily patterns of an "all-American" family of mother, father, son, and daughter. Leave aside for the moment that this type of family constitutes less than one-fourth of American households. In the morning Dad gets in his car and drives from home to work, where he parks the car and spends the day; then, in the late afternoon, he collects the car and drives home. The location of the home was selected in part to ease Dad's daily commute to work.

The mother's local-scale travel patterns are likely to be far more complex than the father's. Mom takes the children to school and returns home. She also drives to the supermarket, visits Grandmother, and walks the dog. In between she organizes the several thousand square feet of space that the family calls home. In the afternoon she picks up the youngsters at school and takes them to Little League or ballet lessons. Later she brings them home, just in time for her to resume her responsibility for organizing the home.

Most American women are now employed at work outside the home, adding a substantial complication to an already complex pattern of moving across urban space. Where is her job located? The family house was already selected largely for access to Dad's place of employment, so Mom may need to travel across town. Who leaves work early to drive a child to a doctor's office? Who takes a day off work when a child is at home sick?

The importance of gender in space is learned as a child. Which child—the boy or girl—went to Little League, and which went to ballet lessons? To which activity is substantially more land allocated in a city—ballfields or dance studios?

If the family described above consisted of persons of color, its connections with space would change. The effects of race on spatial interaction can be seen across America. In downtown Dayton, Ohio, watch the people at the bus stops along the main east-west street, Third Street. In the afternoon, when office workers are heading home, persons of color are waiting on the north side of Third Street for westbound buses, while whites are waiting on the south side for eastbound buses. Why do persons of color head west on Dayton's afternoon buses? Virtually all African Americans in Dayton live on the west side, whereas the east side is home to virtually all white population.

In most U.S. neighborhoods the residents are virtually all white people or virtually all persons of color. Although it is illegal to discriminate against people of color, segregation persists in part because people want to reinforce their cultural identity by living near persons of similar background, and in part because persons of color have lower than average incomes. But many Americans of European ancestry still practice discrimination because of a deep-seated fear of spatial interaction with a person of color.

Openly homosexual men and lesbian women may be attracted to some locations to reinforce spatial interaction with their gays. San Francisco reinforces its reputation as a sympathetic home for homosexuals and lesbians through such practical means as preventing the city from doing business with

companies that do not provide their employees with domestic-partner benefits. Specific neighborhoods in other cities may be known to have large gay populations.

A pet dog doesn't care if you are male or female, black or white, gay or not. As long as you feed it, take care of it, and maintain close spatial interaction with it, your dog will respond with total, unquestioned devotion. Although dogs don't care about these cultural traits, people do. They are key characteristics to which people refer in order to identify who they are. Cultural identity is a source of pride to people at the local scale and an inspiration for personal values.

Even more important than self-identification, these traits matter to other people. They are the criteria by which other people classify us and choose to interact with us. Whatever biological basis may or may not exist for distinguishing among humans, differences in gender, race, and sexual orientation are first and foremost constructed by the attitudes and actions of others. Geographers consider cultural identity to be important in understanding spatial interaction, because humans repeatedly demonstrate that these factors are important in explaining why they sort themselves out in space and move across the landscape in distinctive ways.

All academic disciplines and workplaces have proclaimed sensitivity to issues of cultural diversity. For geographers, concern for cultural diversity is not merely a politically correct expediency; it lies at the heart of geography's spatial tradition. Nor for geographers is deep respect for the dignity of all cultural groups merely a politically correct expediency; it lies at the heart of geography's explanation of why each place on Earth is unique.

Connections Between Places

Geographers increasingly think about connections among places and regions. More rapid connections have reduced the distance across space between places, not literally in miles, of course, but in time. Geographers apply the term **space-time compression** to describe the reduction in the time it takes for something to reach another place. Distant places seem less remote and more accessible to us. We know more about what is happening elsewhere in the world, and we know sooner.

Space-time compression promotes rapid change, as the culture and economy of one place reach other places much more quickly than in the past. With better connections between places, people in one region are now exposed to a constant barrage of cultural traits and economic initiatives from people in other regions, and they may adopt some of these cultural and economic elements (Figure 1-20). Geographers explain the process, called **diffusion**, by which connections are made between regions, as well as the mechanism by which connections are maintained through networks.

Spatial Interaction

In the past, most forms of interaction among cultural groups required the physical movement of settlers, explorers, and plunderers from one location to another. As recently as